

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

AUGUST 2005

TWO DOLLARS





Colonel W. Gerald Massengill Interim Director

It is with tremendous pride and honor that I provide you with a few remarks and comments as the Interim Director of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. After a 37-year career, I retired in the fall of 2003 as Superintendent of the Virginia State Police. As a longtime employee of the Commonwealth, as well as being a career law enforcement officer, I always knew about the work of the "Game Department." But more importantly, I knew about the agency because I have always been a hunter and a fisherman. And more recently, I have become a boater. So I have never had any difficulty relating to what this agency is about and the very important work that all of the folks here do on behalf of our wildlife resources and outdoor recreational opportunities. As this column is written, I have only been here for a week or so. But I can already tell you that it is a privilege to work with the dedicated professionals of this Department who are responsible for managing Virginia's wildlife and natural resources.



in your area by visiting our Web site at www.dgif.virginia.gov, where you can also read the new 2005-2006 Hunting & Trapping in Virginia regulations booklet. A printed copy can be picked up free of charge from license agents across the state. Last year, the Department expanded the booklet to include wildlife information and details on public hunting opportunities, managed hunts and agency workshops organized by our Outdoor Education section.

Another important piece of information you can find in our regulation booklet is how to participate in Hunters for the Hungry. Since 1991, this program has supplied over 2 million pounds of venison to feeding programs across the Commonwealth. This group relies on hunters who donate all or a portion of their harvest and individuals and groups who donate funds to cover the cost of processing the meat. In addition, hunters can contribute \$2 to Hunters for the Hungry when they purchase their hunting licenses. I encourage you to support this worthy program in any way you can.

If you haven't bought your license yet or you're in the market for some new hunting gear, I encourage you to stop by The Virginia Outdoor Sportsman Show, August 12-14, at The Showplace in Richmond. This annual event, in its 22nd year, marks the beginning of the hunting season. As always, our staff will be there to assist you with the purchase of your hunting licenses and biologists and game wardens will be there to answer your questions about wildlife and regulations.

Like many of you, I look forward to the prospect of spending quality time with friends and family in the outdoors this upcoming season. As we head afield, hunting, fishing or boating, I hope that our adventures will be fun, safe and will always make for lasting memories.

With summer winding down, many Virginians are looking forward to the upcoming hunting season. In this issue of *Virginia Wildlife* magazine wildlife biologists from around the state use data collected from the field and harvest information to help compile this year's hunting forecasts. The past decade has served up some great hunting, despite some challenging weather conditions—drought, hurricanes, ice storms and flooding. For the well-prepared hunter, this year looks to be as promising as ever, if not more so.

As a hunter myself, safety is always my number one priority. Hunter safety is emphasized in the Department's free hunter education courses, which include everything from safe firearm handling, map and compass, and first aid, to wilderness survival and general information about wildlife. You can find a class

Mission Statement

To manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; to provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation; to promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing.

Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources

Commonwealth of Virginia
Mark R. Warner, Governor

L HUNTING & FISHING LICENSE FEE S

Subsidized this publication

Secretary of Natural Resources
W. Tayloe Murphy, Jr.

Department of Game and
Inland Fisheries
Colonel W. Gerald Massengill
Interim Director

Members of the Board

Sherry Smith Crumley, Buchanan; Board Chair
Cecil T. Campbell, Warrenton
C. Marshall Davison, Hague
James W. Hazel, Oakton
Randy J. Kozuch, Alexandria
Will McNeely, Charlottesville
John W. Montgomery, Jr., Sandston
Richard E. Railey, Courtland
Charles S. Yates, Cleveland

Magazine Staff

Lee Walker, Editor
Mel White, Ron Messina, Julia Dixon,
Contributing Editors
Emily Pels, Art Director
Carol Kushlak, Production Assistant

Color separations and printing by Nittany
Valley Offset, State College, PA.

Virginia Wildlife (ISSN 0042 6792) is published monthly by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. Send all subscription orders and address changes to *Virginia Wildlife*, P. O. Box 7477, Red Oak, Iowa 51591-0477. Address all other communications concerning this publication to *Virginia Wildlife*, P. O. Box 11104, 4010 West Broad Street, Richmond, Virginia 23230-1104. Subscription rates are \$12.95 for one year, \$23.95 for two years; \$2.00 per each back issue, subject to availability. Out-of-country rate is \$24.95 for one year and must be paid in U.S. funds. No refunds for amounts less than \$5.00. To subscribe, call toll-free (800) 710-9369. Postmaster Please send all address changes to *Virginia Wildlife* P.O. Box 7477, Red Oak, Iowa 51591-0477. Postage for periodicals paid at Richmond, Virginia and additional entry offices.

Copyright 2005 by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. All rights reserved.

The Department of Game and Inland Fisheries shall afford to all persons an equal access to Department programs and facilities without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, disability, sex, or age. If you believe that you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility, please write to: Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, ATTN: Compliance Officer, 4010 West Broad Street, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, Virginia 23230-1104.

"This publication is intended for general informational purposes only and every effort has been made to ensure its accuracy. The information contained herein does not serve as a legal representation of fish and wildlife laws or regulations. The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries does not assume responsibility for any change in dates, regulations, or information that may occur after publication."

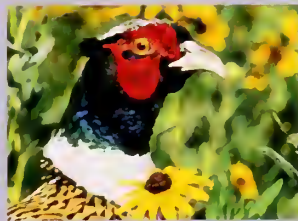
AUGUST CONTENTS



About the cover:
Like many lovers of history, Vintagers find a great deal of pleasure by dressing in traditional English attire and sporting the classic firearms of the Edwardian era. To learn more about Vintagers

and their fascination with the past visit <http://www.vintagers.org>.

©Dwight Dyke



4 A Pickers Up, Pick Me Up by Clarke Jones

Hunting for history offers some unique shooting opportunities.



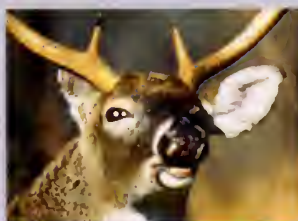
9 Gem of the Oceanfront by Emily M. Grey

The Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum.



14 Are We There Yet? by Bruce Ingram

Experience some of Virginia's best family floats this summer.



18 Virginia's Fall Hunting Forecast by Marc McGlade

Department wildlife biologists share some important information about the upcoming season.



27 Two's Company, Three's A Crowd by Gerald Almy

A do-it-yourself guide to dove hunting.

32 AUGUST JOURNAL

33 Recipes *Easy Meals on the Trail*

34 On the Water *Water Safety Patrols*

35 Naturally Wild *Long-Nosed Gar*

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

Magazine

Subscriptions

For subscriptions,
circulation problems and
address changes call

1-800-710-9369

12 issues for \$12.95

24 issues for \$23.95



Vintagers from around Virginia gather at Christmas Hill Farm for a “jolly good” hunt.

A Pickers Up,

by Clarke Jones
photos ©Dwight Dyke

As a pale, cool sun struggles to make daylight on a brisk Saturday morning in Keene, Virginia, the dog people step from their vehicles and release their retrievers. Some participants have traveled over a hundred miles to this spot just to do what retrievers were born to do. The dogs begin to search for a particular spot while their handlers search for caffeine in the rustic warmth of a former caretaker’s cottage, which is now used as an assembly area for the shooters, pickers up





©John R. Ford

Pick Me Up



and lunch. Thus starts another pheasant circle shoot in Virginia.

Circle or tower shoots are a somewhat modified simulation of driven pheasant and grouse shoots that have been a sporting tradition in Europe for over 100 years. They provide not only a sporting opportunity to shooters and retriever owners, but it also augments income to the landowner, helping to preserve open spaces and



slow the pace of development. This is done without the added cost of raising and caring of pheasants; the cost of a gamekeeper; the manpower required for beaters; or massive amounts of acreage.

Normally pheasants are released from a tower in the center of a circle and fly over 8 to 12 gunners who are placed 60 to 100 yards from the center of the circle. Because a pheasant's flight may be determined by wind, sun or available cover, gunners rotate their positions around the perimeter of the circle after a specified number

Far left: Huntmaster Jim Rice goes over safety tips with hunters before going afield. Left: Hunters are transported to their stations on a horse drawn wagon. Upper left: After being assigned to stations hunters prepare for some quick shooting, as fast flying pheasants pass their way. Left: After the morning hunt participants return for lunch, featuring, what else, but pheasant cordon bleu.



of birds have been released to assure each gunner a shooting opportunity.

For safety reasons no more than two shooters are usually allowed at each peg or station on the circle's perimeter. Allowing two shooters also provides an excellent opportunity for a parent to safely introduce and instruct his or her child to the sport.

Susan Whitlock, the petit organizer of the pickers up, as the retrievers and their handlers are called, assigns each one to their respective places and instructs them with the day's rotation order and the number of "drives" for the shoot.

Attire at circle shoots can vary, but when members of the Vintagers participate these shoots take on a unique form of pageantry. The Vintagers are a national organization started in 1994, and represent a stylish form of shooting sport. They enjoy shooting vintage firearms at both game and clays while wearing clothing of the Edwardian period (1880-1914). For men that may include tattersall shirts with a tie and tweed vest or shooting jacket as well as knickers and leggings. Their attire may look out of place to those who think of hunting as all camo and blaze orange, but it is not out of place at some driven or circle shoots. The attraction for this type of organization may be that as we tend to see our wildlife habitat slip away, along with our hunting traditions, the things of the past seem to be more romantic or valuable. So as lovers of old classic cars or antique furniture, Vintagers, or those like them, find a certain nostalgia simulating the days before Gore-Tex and Thinsulate.

Jim Rice, overseer of the Christmas Hill Farm shoots, gathers the shooters around the caretaker's house and begins his welcome and famous safety speech. His jovial personality takes on a serious tone when it comes to shooting safety. Jim is well aware there may be shooters who have never participated in this type



Top: The author with his Labrador retriever, Luke. Left: Vintagers are as serious about their clothing, as they are about hunting.



Above: Using a vintage hammerlock shotgun is just part of reliving the past for Jim Rice. Upper right: John Lewis uses the time spent during the vintage hunts to train his English retrievers. Right: The traditional English style hunts at Christmas Hill Farm are also designed to help introduce young adults to the thrill of upland bird hunting.



of sport or there may be young shooters with a parent who may never have shot at live game before. In no uncertain terms he makes clear what he expects from all participants.

Immediately after the shooters have received their instructions a wagon, pulled by two Belgian horses, carries them to their assigned positions.

When a horn sounds to signal the first release of pheasants, an air of tentative anticipation falls over the shooting field. Pickers up sit and steady their retrievers. Guns are loaded and snapped shut. You can almost hear the shooters mental senses switch on to full alert.

The first pheasant blasts through the air 60 yards overhead jetting for freedom. Gunners at station 6 fire a two-gun salute and the cock gives a mocking cackle and keeps flying to the next county. Two more pheasant burst from the trees and take advantage of shooting rust, shaky nerves, or inexperience and join the first bird. The pheasants are coming rapidly.



There are more misses, as leads have not been correctly calculated. The fall fragrance of cordite fills the air. Young retrievers, new to so many shots fired at once, spin like black furry tops straining against leash or impulse to give chase to any missed bird flying seductively overhead.

One of the rewards for a dog handler is watching his or her dog learn how shoots work. Just as an experienced shooter knows there will be plenty of action and can pick his shots, an experienced retriever gives only a quick casual glance at a missed bird then turns back around looking skyward to where the pheasants appeared before. The retriever learns as well not every shot means a downed bird and every downed bird is not his retrieve. This type of shooting is a positive experience for both handler and dog. It gives the handler a chance to steady his dog and the dog learns to trust the handler in what can be a nervous situation.

As another pheasant comes high and fast from the cover, one of the Vintagers follows the birds flight, pulls the trigger and neatly folds the bird, which drops within 10 feet of his station. It does not matter how you dress. If you can shoot—you can shoot!

After the allotted number of released birds, a horn sounds; gunners break open their guns and move to the next station. This is repeated for almost two hours and then it is time for lunch.

Lunch at Christmas Hill is not your pack of nabs, Vienna sausages and soft drink. Ruth Warham prepares a lunch for shooters and pickers up alike that may be the real reason people drive over 100 miles to this shoot. Lunch could consist of pheasant cordon bleu, a fresh garden salad, barbeque chicken, macaroni and cheese, the best pecan pie you ever tasted, homemade brownies with white icing and the ever present iced tea. Ruth turns down more than one marriage proposal at each shoot and everyone pictures Mr. Warham with the broadest grin in Virginia every time he sits down to dinner.

After lunch the shooters walk, ride or waddle back to the field and position themselves for the afternoon drives. The afternoon period is shorter than the morning releases and allows shooters to socialize and critique the shoot and each other. The pheasants are cleaned for a slight fee or as shot at no charge.

Circle shoots are a unique outdoor opportunity for the novice and experienced shooter and help fill a void

created by less habitat and places to hunt. In addition to providing fast action for the shooter and a wonderful training situation for those who love working retrievers, it also helps educate people about both rural life and wildlife. □

Clarke Jones, a native Virginian, is a freelance writer when not selling real estate or group health benefits. He prefers to spend as much time afield hunting upland game birds and waterfowl with his black lab, Luke.



By the end of the day first time hunters and die-hard Vintagers will not only go home with some great memories, but also with some great tasting pheasant.

The Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum is dedicated to preserving, promoting and perpetuating wildfowling history of the Atlantic Flyway.



Gem of the Oceanfront



by Emily M. Grey

Amidst a concrete jungle of commercial high rises is Virginia Beach's oldest remaining beach front building listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the de Witt Cottage is a unique treasure.

In 1895, the city's first postmaster and mayor, Bernard P. Holland, built the grand structure. Because his bride was dissatisfied with the pounding surf and building's smallness, the couple's tenure there was short-lived.

In 1909, Cornelius de Witt, a cotton broker and Norfolk banker, purchased the Victorian home. One can imagine the pitter-patter of 10 de Witt



Top: Tom Beatty is the current director of the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum, which resides in the old de Witt Cottage, nestled between the high rise hotels in the resort city of Virginia Beach. Left: In addition to the museum visitors can see the city's first stand-alone library and a traditional bathhouse. photos ©Emily Grey

children scurrying through trapdoors to the basement and up the attic. An avid hunter, their father sighted ducks and geese from the open cupola on the roof.

During the Great Depression, some of the children operated the cottage as a popular guesthouse. Several of de Witt's daughters lived at "Wittenzand" or "white sand," as they affectionately called the dwelling, until the city purchased it in 1988.



ca like their forefathers had in Europe. Babe Ruth, Jack Dempsey, President Grover Cleveland and other privileged men and sports celebrities gunned in Back Bay, Knotts Island, and the Eastern Shore barrier islands during the region's hunting club heyday.

Upon entering the main gallery, one can visualize a simpler, romantic era and invigorating conversation in a hunting club parlor. Decoys, artifacts and pictures of the 1900 gunning clubs of Back Bay, Virginia and Currituck Sound, North Carolina dress the hallowed walls and shelves.

Adjoining this room a contemporary section displays newer decorative style decoys, crafted largely by museum guild members and award winning mid-Atlantic area carvers. Featured in this gallery are hand-



photo courtesy of Bud Coppedge and Archie Johnson

The de Witt family, the Virginia Beach Foundation, the City of Virginia Beach, the Back Bay Wildfowl Guild, and the Princess Anne Garden Club worked together to preserve this choice turn-of-the-century heritage building. In 1991, community volunteers joined in the restoration.

In July 1995, the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum was born. This cultural and educational center focuses on the preservation and promotion of wildfowl artifacts, waterfowl history, and contemporary

The museum houses an impressive collection of hunting memorabilia, early and new waterfowl carvings, along with historical photographs and paintings of Virginia Beach.
photo ©Emily Grey

wildfowl art. It also provides an accurate representation of the early history of Virginia Beach through photographs, oral reports, and the de Witt cottage.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, a myriad of politicians and industrial moguls hunted waterfowl in Ameri-

carved songbirds by local artist, C. Gerald Harris.

An interactive computer exhibit provides information about indigenous migratory birds of the Atlantic flyway. Another program allows visitors to paint a silhouetted duck.

Tucked away in a chamber, a live carver whittles away each day. A gift shop chocked-full of hand carved decoys, birding books, wildlife art, photography, and jewelry leads to the second floor.

Upstairs, the narrow corridor and

meeting room are adorned with oil and watercolor paintings, drawings and photographs donated and loaned by guild member Edgar Brown and other generous parties. Among the black and white images is Virginia Beach frozen over in 1936.

Cottage guests, children and gunners once huddled around the period fireplace set amongst a white-wainscotted ceiling and walls. In the art gallery, photographs, carvings and other art forms embellish the de Witt family walnut table. Administrative offices, lighting and a few other modern amenities belie the yesteryears.

Volunteers greet patrons and are available to answer questions or conduct tours. Or, one can roam at will the museum and grounds.

Bordering the street is a renovated, climate-controlled boathouse. A black and white mural depicting early hunting days covers an entire wall. Donated duck stamps, mounted waterfowl and watermen's primitive equipment set the stage for carving classes.

Between the boathouse and the museum (cottage) is the city's first stand-alone library. The de Witt sisters helped found this resource and volunteered there.

Originally located near the 17th Street railroad station, this free of charge lending library was moved several times. It served as a welfare bank, city storeroom and other purposes.

Books from the 1930s and 40s, an old desk, hanging straw hats and photos adorn the one-room structure. Contemporary blinds, carpeting and a security system offer essential comfort with minimal extravagance.

A fetching white picket fence landscaped with sea tolerant flora surrounds the three buildings. Wooden benches amongst the tansy,



Bud Coppedge is just one of the many dedicated volunteers that help to preserve the areas waterfowl carving and hunting heritage. Bud and close friend Archie Johnson co-authored the book, Gun Clubs and Decoys of Back Bay and Currituck, which in itself has become a collector's item, highlighting the hunting history of the area. photo ©Emily Grey

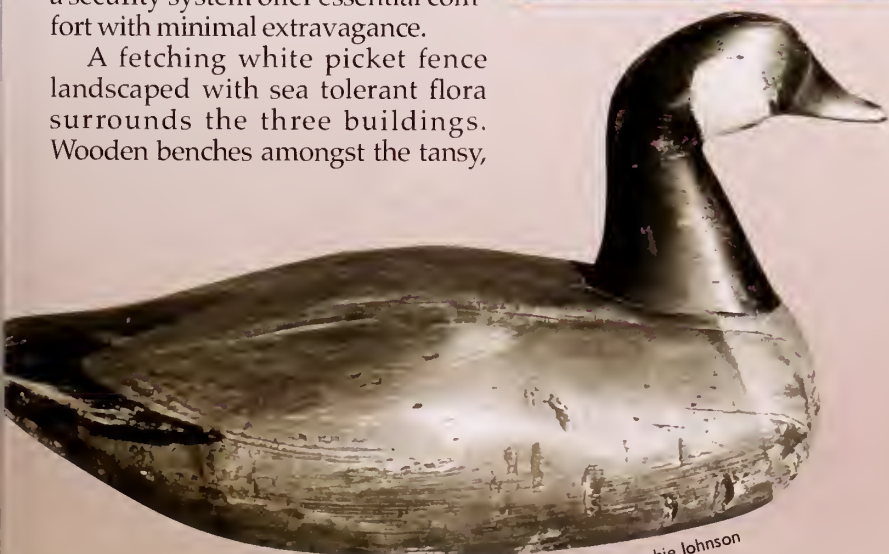


photo courtesy of Bud Coppedge and Archie Johnson

herbs and wildflowers beckon wayfarers to sit a spell and relish the fresh salt-sprayed air. This venue is featured yearly on the Virginia Historic Garden Tour and is listed on the Vir-



Support This Splendid Resource

Wildlife watchers, waterfowl hunters, artists, historians and photographers naturally flock to this grand relic. Joining the Back Bay Wildfowl Guild (parent of the museum) entitles members to newsletters and a 10 percent discount on gift shop items. Donations and volunteers help keep the museum's valuable history of wildfowl art afloat for future generations.

Individual: \$25
Family: \$35
Corporate: \$200
Sponsor: \$500

Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum
1113 Atlantic Ave.
Virginia Beach, VA 23451
(757) 437-8432
www.awhm.org

Museum Hours: Free Admission
Tuesday through Saturday, 10:00 a.m.
to 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, Noon to 5:00 p.m.
Open Mondays Memorial Day to
October 1st
Closed: Thanksgiving, Christmas, New
Year's Eve and New Year's Day
Handicap Accessible
Children Welcome

The Back Bay Birding Club meets four
times per year at the museum. The follow-
ing expeditions are set for the remainder
of 2005:

September 3 – Back Bay National Wildlife
Refuge

October 1 – Kiptopeke, Eastern Shore of
Virginia National Wildlife Refuge,
Eyre Hall

November 5 – Henricus/Dutch Gap
December 2 –4 – Virginia Society of
Ornithology's annual Virginia Beach
weekend

To sign-up for a birdwalk, e-mail:
bbbcbirdwalks@aol.com.

photo courtesy of Bud Coppedge and Archie Johnson



Even though the museum is small it houses an impressive collection of period decoys that were used up and down the Atlantic Flyway.

ginia Birding and Wildlife Coastal
Trail.

"The off-season (November
through April) is an especially good
time to go through the museum at
leisure," said Tom Beatty, Museum
Director. "There are no large crowds
or hustle or bustle."

"Our location makes this a nice
place for birding," added the former
history teacher from West Virginia.
"In September and October, we see
lots of songbirds in the yard."

From rocking chairs on the cot-
tage's covered porch, beach goers,
birdwatchers and museum patrons
enjoy the ocean's energy. On this late
January day, scoters, red-breasted
mergansers, buffleheads and north-
ern gannets rode the Atlantic white-
caps.

A rowboat, paint long flecked off,
and oars rested against the porch. No
doubt this wooden vessel and cot-
tage endured much weathering.
While other buildings and boats fell
to demolition, new ownership and
the 1962 Ash Wednesday storm, the
de Witt Cottage and its accompan-
ing history, integrity and wildness
were salvaged. This living legacy of
waterfowl and city history and art
captures the beauty, sadness and fer-
vor of a bygone age. A new transi-
tional time remembers and honors
that past.



*Monthly guild meetings are held at the
museum January-June and September-
November, featuring decoy and wildfowl
carvers, wildlife artists and photogra-
phers. ©Emily Grey*

Gun Clubs and Decoys

An early 1900s waterman's shack
comes alive as celebrated hunting
style decoy carver, Bud Coppedge,
whittles canvasbacks, redheads and
shorebirds. An old coal stove, firearm
and other necessary clutter set a cozy
rustic ambience.

Coppedge's handsome art is dis-
played on a workbench, formerly be-
longing to B.P. Holland, original
owner of the cottage. This antique



photo courtesy of Bud Coppedge and Archie Johnson



furniture was created from a ship's hatch cover and used in the Holland Marsh Club on Back Bay.

"Carving is a good, relaxing therapy," says Coppedge, a retired police communications officer. "I enjoy meeting the public and talking history."

Visitors can purchase *Gun Clubs and Decoys of Back Bay and Currituck Sound*, written by Bud Coppedge and Archie Johnson, at the museum gift shop. Only 200 copies are left of this valuable collector's item. There may be no more printings.

This excellent photo essay of early waterfowling history identifies over 100 lodges and hunting clubs on Back Bay, Virginia and North Carolina's Currituck Sound. Major carvers' biographies are presented as well as the life and customs of hunting club caretakers, guides, cooks and boat builders. Rare, previously unpublished decoy images are documented. Some originals are believed to be taken by George Eastman, founder of the Eastman Kodak Company.

"Having a carver at the museum each day makes a big difference," said Tom Beatty. "People sit and watch them do their craft and art form. They learn that this American tradition began with the Indians."

Emily Grey is a naturalist, outdoor writer, photojournalist, and attorney from Virginia's Eastern Shore.



photo courtesy of Bud Coppedge and Archie Johnson

Fascinating photos of days gone by, one of a kind decoys and friendly volunteers, who love sharing the history of the area, make the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum one of the real gems of Virginia Beach.

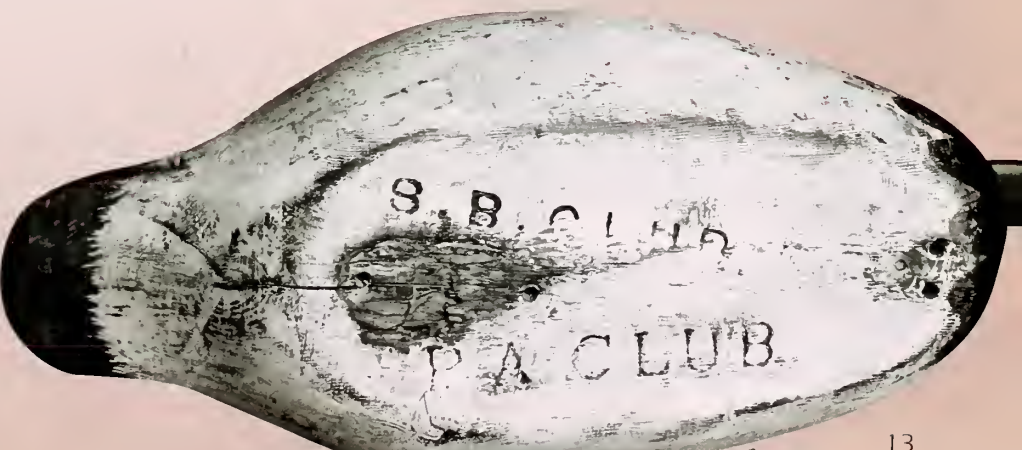
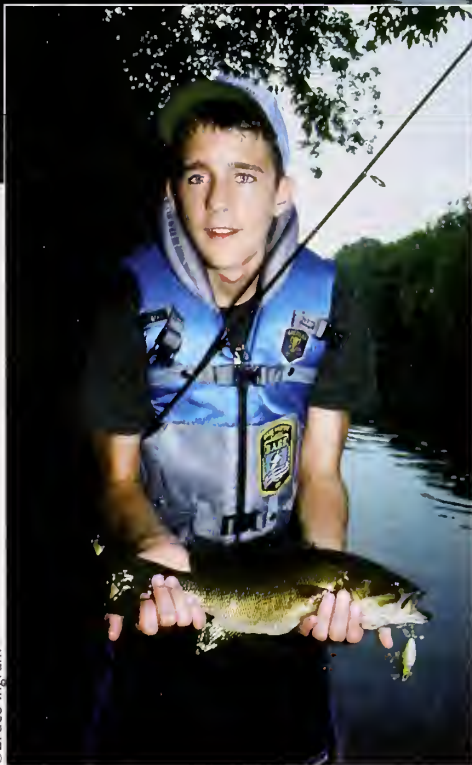


photo courtesy of Bud Coppedge and Archie Johnson

Are We There



Experience some of Virginia's best family floats this summer.

by Bruce Ingram

If I were interested in floating a Virginia river as part of a white-water adventure, I would head for the James as it courses through Richmond and drops precipitously at the fall line. Or perhaps I would raft or kayak down Molly Osborne Shoals and Penitentiary Shoals on the upper New. If I had a desire to sam-

ple some of the best smallmouth bass fishing in the South, I would take any number of float trips on the James, New, South Fork of the Shenandoah and other Old Dominion upland rivers.

But if I wanted to take my wife and kids or introduce couples or families new to the pastime of canoeing, I would make, in many cases, an entirely different selection of excur-

Yet?



Above: The Six-Mile Bridge float is a Lynchburg area getaway that is just right for families. Left: The James River, as well as many other state streams, offers excellent angling opportunities and wildlife watching.

sions. I would consider a host of factors such as ease of navigation, bird watching opportunities, scenic possibilities for photographers, amenities nearby and angling prospects for such species as rock bass, redbreast sunfish as well as smallmouths. With all those factors in mind, here are some of Virginia's most family friendly floats.

The Lynchburg James

In downtown Lynchburg and its outlying regions, several floats exist below Scotts Mill Dam that are ideal for couples or families. The first of these is the mouth of Blackwater Creek to Six-Mile Bridge (6 miles) junket. The put-in is on river right off Ninth Street in the heart of Lynchburg, and the take-out is just above Six Mile Bridge on river right where Beaver Creek enters. The access point can be reached via Route 726 and Route 460.

One of the major features of the Blackwater Creek getaway is Percival's Island, which lies just downstream from the put-in. (U.S. Route 29 crosses the James at the upper end of the island.) The Percival's Island Nature Trail is a marvelous place to bird watch with its waterfowl, great blue herons, kingfishers and orchard orioles constituting just a few of the species available.

After you pass Percival's Island, you will enter an S-curve with Setting Pole Falls at the conclusion. In reality, no major drop in the river bottom occurs here, and only riffles form. Indeed, no rapids exist on the Blackwater Creek float, which is another reason that it is appealing for families.

For the next several miles, the James flows very gently. Water willow beds, midstream boulders and the occasional riffle offer photography and fishing possibilities. The last major feature is Feagans Island with its braided channels and abundant birdlife. In my opinion, this land mass offers the best photo opportunity of the trip, as the island is heavily wooded and water willow grows in great profusion.

The Six-Mile Bridge to Joshua Falls (4 miles) trip is yet another marvelous excursion for families. On one mid summer outing, I logged 31 different species of birds on this short getaway, even though the temperature was in the upper 80s. Another virtue is that only a few easy Class I rapids dot this section.

At the beginning of the float, you will drift under Six-Mile

Bridge and through a series of gentle riffles. Then you will come to the Buzzard Islands area. This is a group of islands that typically sport wood ducks, mallards, Canada geese, red-wing blackbirds, yellow warblers and legions of other avians. A river left outside bend next forms, and you will drift through an easy Class I and past a small island. Then you will paddle through a series of riffles before you come to Nine-Mile Bridge. The take-out lies about a mile downstream from the bridge on river right and off Route 726.

Insider Tips:

✓ Besides the Percival's Island Nature Trail, outdoor enthusiasts may want to travel along the Blackwater Creek Trail, which is ideal for hikers and bikers. Also nearby is Peaks View Park with its trails. For more information, contact the Lynchburg Visitors Center (800-REAL-VA-1; www.discoverlynchburg.org). Blackwater Creek Bike and Canoe Rentals (434-845-0293) is another helpful information source.



Wood duck ©John R. Ford

Front Royal and the Daughter of the Stars

Elaine and I relish taking the Karo to Front Royal (6 miles) float, except for the Class I to II Karo Rapid at its very beginning, the South Fork of the Shenandoah flows very gently. Another positive about this trip is the beauty of the Massanutten Mountains in the background, making it easy to understand why the Native Americans cherished this river so much that they named it Daughter of the Stars.

At Karo, the river right put-in is a gravel ramp on Gooney Run. Chapman Farm Road, via Route 340, leads to this access point. In nearby Front Royal, the

river right take-out is a concrete ramp off Route 681 (Criser Road) via Route 340.

Come mid to late summer, Karo Rapid is often no more than a Class I, but paddlers may portage this rapid on its far right next to an island. After you course through Karo Rapid, you will soon enter a two-mile long river left curve. If your children are new to angling, this bend is a superlative place to give them the opportunity to fish for redbreast sunfish, as this

bend features shaded banks, downed logs and brush piles; ideal redbreast habitat. Eastern wood pee-wees, great crested flycatchers, phoebes and Acadian flycatchers will be busily flitting about and decimating the airborne insect population, and wood thrushes, scarlet tanagers and red-eyed vireos will serenade you as well. Keep your binoculars handy.

The next major feature is the half-

mile long or so Kings Eddy. Photography enthusiasts may want to capture on film some majestic river right bluffs in this area. The South Fork drifts very lazily through this section, so picture takers will be able to size up the bluffs from a variety of angles.

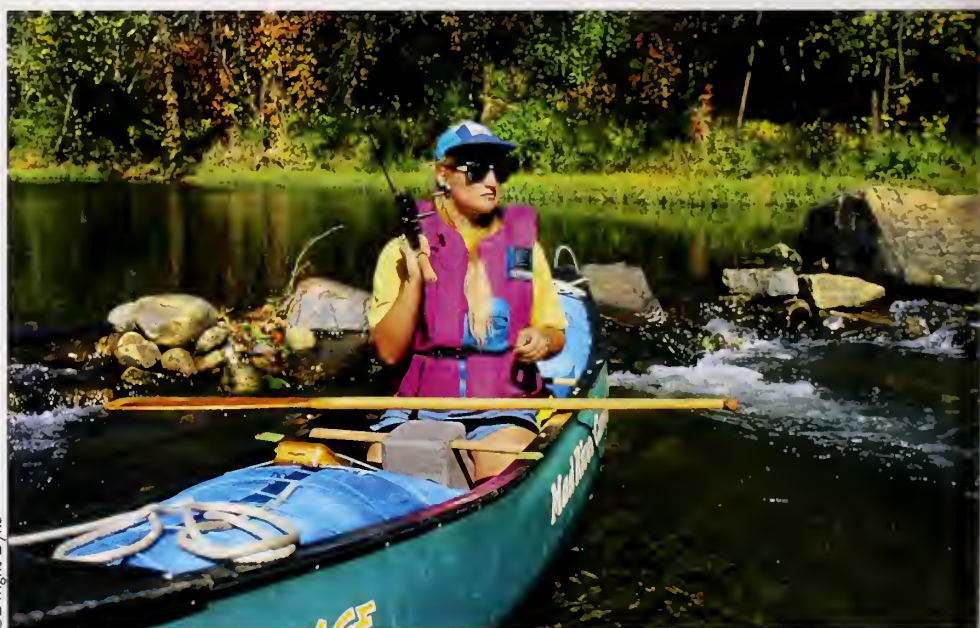
After you leave Kings Eddy, you will enter a two-mile long river left outside bend that is replete with rifles, deep-water ledges, water willow beds and wooded shorelines. This is yet another very scenic section, and the many water willow beds offer opportunities for couples and their kids to take a break, have something to eat and look for the frogs, minnows, crayfish and the host of other aquatic and edge loving creatures that typically congregate around water willow.

If you arrive at this section after midday, expect to view some intense hatches of damsel and dragonflies and the equally intense feeding upon these creatures that is undertaken by smallmouth bass. Tie on a topwater lure for your kid and let him or her experience the thrill of surface fishing for smallies.

The last major feature is the Class I Three Chute Rapid; take the middle passageway for the easiest navigation. The river then slows and a 10-minute or so paddle will bring you to the take-out.



Great blue heron ©John R. Ford



©Dwight Dyke

The Karo to Front Royal float on the Shenandoah River offers easy access, along with some family fun paddling time.



©Bruce Ingram

The New River is not just for whitewater enthusiasts; there are miles and miles of family-friendly floats that you can do on your own or with the help of one of the many experienced guides or outfitters.

Insider Tips:

✓ Front Royal makes for a convenient base. Stop by or call the friendly folks at the Front Royal Visitor's Center (800-338-2576; www.frontroyalchamber.com) and ask for information about the community's Bed and Breakfasts, restaurants and historical sites. Be sure to ask for directions to the Belle Boyd College on Cherry Street. Miss Boyd, a Confederate spy, was known for her ability to bewitch Yankees. For canoe rental, contact the Front Royal Canoe Company (800-270-8808; www.frontroyalcanoe.com).

The New River and Splendid Isolation

If you want to introduce your spouse or children to some stunningly beautiful western Virginia countryside, give them a hint of what wilderness canoeing looks like, yet not be out in the wilderness, then consider the Baywood to Riverside (8 ½ miles) getaway on the upper New above Claytor Lake. Many trips on the upper New flaunt some extremely challenging rapids, but except for the Class II Joyce's Rapid, which is easily portaged, the Baywood junket proffers very easy paddling.

At Baywood, the river right put-in is just past the Route 58/221 Bridge. At Riverside, the river left take-out is near the junction of Routes 274 and 94. Both access points offer plenty of parking spaces.

The first 2 miles of this jaunt contain riffles, an easy Class I, mid river ledges and boulders and very mundane scenery in the form of trailers and summer cabins. But almost the entirety of the rest of the trip provides a very aesthetic experience as heavily wooded shorelines, boulders, deep-water ledges, and water willow islets characterize the New. Raptor fans can expect to glimpse ospreys, broad-wing and red-tail hawks and perhaps even a bald eagle. Carolina wrens, yellow-throated vireos, scarlet tanagers, orchard orioles, wood thrushes and hooded warblers will add their lilting tunes to the surroundings.

For camera fans, the wooded shorelines, small bluffs and mid river boulders offer the opportunity for the enterprising photographer to frame some very fetching shots. Throughout this excursion, the river teems with good numbers of rock bass and bronzebacks.

At about the 6-mile point, Joyce's Rapid will require a portage, do so on river left. I do not recommend running Joyce's as some very large boulders dot it about one-third through its length. Again, the portaging of this rapid is a small thing to do in exchange for all that the Baywood float has to offer.

Insider Tips:

✓ For canoe rental, contact New River Canoe Rental in Independence (336-372-8793 or 276-773-3412; www.canoeingthenew.com) or Tangent Outfitters in Radford (540-731-5202; www.newrivertrail.com). Tangent Outfitters also offers bike rental for the New River Trail, which parallels the New for much of its length above Claytor Lake. The trail is very flat and ideal for family biking.

One last word of advice. My wife, children and I never take off our lifejackets while we are floating a Virginia river. Three times during my two decades of floating the state's major rivers, I have been thrown out of a boat while coursing through a major rapid and on all three of those occasions I am convinced that my lifejacket saved me from a possible drowning.

But lifejackets are not just for Class II and above rapids. When my daughter Sarah was just 6 years old, she and Elaine overturned in a shallow three-foot deep pool on the South Fork of the Shenandoah. My wife and child hit the only rock in the entire pool, the boat became tipsy, the two overcompensated and over they went. Fortunately, neither was injured but both were thankful they had had on their lifejackets. I, too, have turned over in the most placid water, usually when I was paying more attention to fishing or bird watching than to paddling. Please consider keeping your lifejacket on at all times, no matter how high the temperature or how shallow and rapid-free the river.

Of course, Virginia offers many more family friendly trips than the ones mentioned here. But the ones detailed are enough to start you, your spouse and children on a lifetime of pleasure exploring the Commonwealth's waterways. □

Bruce Ingram is the author of the following books: The James River Guide (\$15.00), The New River Guide (\$15.00), and The Shenandoah/Rappahannock Rivers Guide (\$18.25). To obtain a copy, send a check to Ingram at P.O. Box 429, Fincastle, VA 24090.

Virginia's Fall H

*Overall, the
2004-2005 hunting
season was good.
Will 2005-2006 be
even better?*

by Marc N. McGlade

As the fall hunting season approaches, it is helpful to hear from the Department's wildlife biologists for the season's prospects. They are the first to tell you that performing a spot-on forecast is no easy task, since much of it depends on mast crops, weather and other key factors.

It is in no way as simple as stating that last year was good; this year will be better. It does not work that way. Many tidbits of information come into play throughout the year, dictating game behavior and availability to hunters. However, most of Virginia's game species are in good shape and when the stars are in alignment, all should be right with the world and for Commonwealth hunters.

One can only hope that this year is yet again a stellar season for Old Dominion hunters. Profiled in this forecast are waterfowl, upland birds, small game and big game.

Hunters who want to get a jump on the new season can give Canada goose or dove hunting a try, beginning in September. Remember, all migratory game bird hunters must be HIP registered before going hunting. Register online at www.dgif.virginia.gov or call 1-888-788-9772.



©Soc Clay

Hunting Forecast

Duck-Duck-Goose

"Forecasting Virginia's waterfowl hunting season is akin to predicting the weather, in that waterfowl production and wintering distribution are heavily influenced by the weather," says Tom Bidrowski, the waterfowl project leader in Williamsburg. "Many Virginia waterfowlers realize what happens on the breeding grounds does not paint the complete picture for waterfowling."

Being wintering termini, Virginia's duck numbers are at the whim of the weather. Mild weather of fall and early winter or even a warm spell in the dead of winter may prevent waterfowl from being frozen or weathered-out up north, Bidrowski says. It allows some birds in Virginia to remain in the mountain and Piedmont areas, and in backwater beaver ponds, rather than moving to the more traditionally hunted locations.

In the last few years, waterfowlers have enjoyed liberal duck seasons that have resulted in high harvests in Virginia, he indicates. The long season offers the opportunity for more days afield and a greater cumulative harvest over the course of the season. However, Bidrowski points out that a harvest restriction will remain for several species of concern including black ducks, canvasbacks, scaups and pintails.

"Conditions have been even more favorable if you are a Virginia goose hunter," Bidrowski says. "Migrant populations have made a tremendous rebound since the lows of the early 1990s, and the seasons have increased in conjunction with increasing goose numbers. Resident Canada geese have been an incredible resource for Virginia waterfowl hunters, particularly for those who

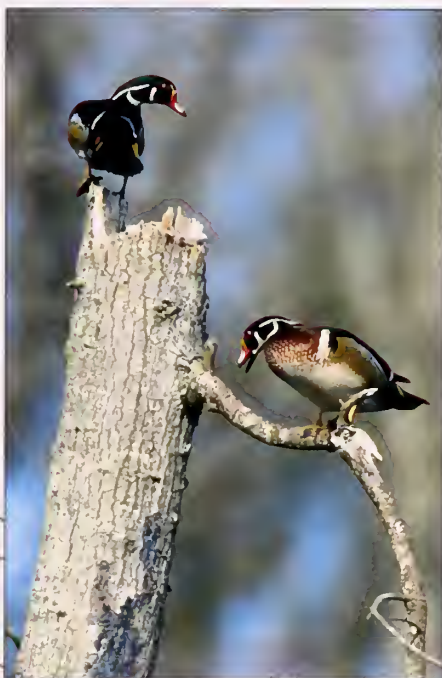
hunt west of Interstate 95, where a long season with liberal bag limits offer sportsmen ample opportunity to bag a goose."

Pre-season scouting is a must, contends Bidrowski. He also believes this is an excellent opportunity to brush up on waterfowl identification skills.

"However, finding a hunting spot in Virginia can be difficult," he says. "To find a good spot not only requires some pre-season scouting, but some reconnaissance throughout the season as waterfowl numbers fluctuate greatly during the season and so does competition for quality spots."

Bidrowski advises that a good opportunity for a quality hunt is to apply for one of the Department's managed hunts. For those who are unlucky in the lottery, Wildlife Management Areas such as Princess Anne, Chickahominy and Game Farm Marsh in eastern Virginia offer excellent opportunities.

"Teal populations are fairly strong and the special September teal season offers hunters a chance to brush up on their wing shooting," he says. "The September goose season runs congruent with the teal season and will provide hunters a chance to bag a teal or two along with a goose. The warm weather and plentiful birds are also an excellent opportunity to take a youth hunting."



© Joe Mac Hudspeth Jr.

A great way to introduce a youngster to hunting is to participate in the annual Youth Waterfowl Hunting Day. Over 50 young adults gathered at Hog Island WMA last year and were treated to an exceptional day of hunting and outdoor activities.



Lee Walker



Rabbits, Quail and Bushytails

If hunting rabbits, bobwhite quail (*Colinus virginianus*) or squirrels begins to motivate you when August arrives, keep reading.

Patrick Cook, the Department's small game biologist from the Farmville office, has some good news to share. Unlike big game (deer, turkey and bear), the Department does not keep official records of small game harvest. Even so, Cook has some data to represent information taken from the most recent general hunter survey from the 2001-2002 season.

"Our most recent general hunter survey suggests that 80,588 quail, 367,906 rabbits and 959,778 squirrels were harvested during that season," Cook says.

As most avid hunters know, quail have declined dramatically over the years in Virginia and much of the remainder of the South.

"The decline can be mostly attributed to habitat loss and degradation," Cook adds. "However, abundant rainfall in the last couple years has improved the quality of nesting and brood habitat and our most recent survey suggests that the Virginia quail population increased 22 percent from 2002 to 2004. Of course, quail will still not be abundant. Hunters have to hunt

©Marc McGlade



hard and have reasonable expectations."

Cook says bobwhites are most abundant in Tidewater. There are also some localized areas in the east Piedmont and northern regions with relatively high quail populations.

"The best opportunities are found on private farmlands in Tidewater and on 2- to 5-year-old clear-cuts (private lands and some public lands such as state forests) in the Tidewater, and the north, east and west Piedmont regions," he says. "As a quail hunter, I know first hand that quail hunting is a difficult sport in Virginia. There are still pockets of good habitat and therefore quail, but you must actively seek them out."

Rabbit populations have likely benefited from recent weather conditions, too, says Cook. The temperatures during December 2004 through mid-January 2005 were very mild, extending the availability of green plants.

"This hopefully allowed for high-

©Bill Lee



lent index to population trends," says Gary Norman, the forest game bird project leader in Verona. "Mast conditions in much of Virginia's grouse range were better in 2004 than we've seen in several years. These good food conditions may increase reproductive success of grouse females this summer and improve the population estimates."

Norman adds that grouse hunting may never be what it was in the 1950s and 1960s, but by today's standards, the 2005 season holds some hope of an improved season given last year's mast crop and the promise of improved reproduction in 2005. He recommends hunters try the Jefferson National Forest in the southwestern counties, coal company lands in Southwest Virginia and southern counties along the Blue Ridge.

Bucks, Clucks and Bears

"During the 2004 deer season, 220,538 deer were reported killed by deer hunters in Virginia," says Matt Knox, the deer program supervisor

er over-winter survival and more rabbits entering the breeding season in top physical condition," he says. "Again, if good weather (abundant rainfall) persisted during the breeding season, rabbits should be relatively plentiful this season."

Cook recommends the southwest mountain region for the best cottontail hunting. They are also abundant across the rest of the state, but he says they are least abundant in the east Piedmont region.

As any homeowner with a backyard knows, squirrels are abundant in Virginia. That is true in the wild woods, too.

"Squirrels are perhaps our most abundant game species," Cook says. "An annual Department survey suggests that Virginia's squirrel population has nearly tripled since the survey began in 1988. Squirrel populations are typically regulated by availability of autumn hard mast (acorns, hickory nuts, etc.). Mast failures tend to lead to population declines."

A lot of attention has been given to the state's excellent deer, bear and turkey hunting, but hunters are reminded that many of the small game species, including squirrel and rabbit, provide good hunting opportunities.

Fortunately, Cook indicates that last year's mast survey suggested there was an adequate supply of acorns. Therefore, bushytails should be plentiful again this coming season, he says.

Gray squirrels are most abundant in the northern region, but a plentiful supply can be found in any mature hardwood stand in the state. Fox squirrels are, for the most part, limited to the western part of the Commonwealth.

The upland game bird of choice in Virginia is the ruffed grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*). Ruffed grouse mainly inhabit the western half of the state.

"In the case of ruffed grouse, the frequency of drumming is an excel-



©Soc Clay



©Bill Lea

in Forest. "This total included 105,933 antlered males, 20,240 male fawns and 94,365 females (representing 42.8 percent). The 2004 total represented a 7 percent decrease from the 237,035 deer that were reported killed in 2003, although it should be noted that the 2004 kill figure represented the second highest annual deer kill ever reported in the Commonwealth and above the last 10-year average of approximately 207,200."

Knox says archers—including crossbow hunters—killed 16,623 deer. The 2004 archery kill was down almost 3 percent from the 2003 total. Archery constituted approximately 7 to 8 percent of the total deer kill.

Smokepole deer hunters killed 48,595 animals in 2004. This represented an 8 percent decline from the 52,779 specimens taken by muzzle-

loaders in 2003. Statewide, muzzle-loading comprised 22 percent of the total deer kill.

"Tidewater deer-kill levels have been the most stable in the state for the past decade, averaging about 46,300 deer killed annually," he says. "The biological data indicates the deer herd condition is fair to good."

Stable deer populations and antlered buck-kill levels are predicted for the upcoming fall, Knox says. A slight increase or decrease in the Tidewater deer kill is expected for fall 2005.

As for the northern Piedmont region, Knox says there is good and bad deer management news. The good news, he says, is that female deer-kill levels and numbers have been increasing steadily for the past 5 to 6 years in this region, and the last

two seasons have been record doe kill years. The bad news is that the deer-kill levels have increased significantly over the past decade.

"Increasing and record deer kills in this area are not good," he says. "Two surveys conducted by the Department over the past decade have clearly indicated that the majority of citizens in northern Virginia would like to see the deer population reduced. Hopefully, female kill levels are at or approaching the point required to stop the growth of the deer herd over much of the northern Piedmont, but there is one area in the far northern Piedmont that remains a serious deer management issue—Fairfax, Loudoun and Prince William counties."

The biological condition data indicates that overall deer herd quality



Before heading afield this season make sure you purchase a hunting license. Also, don't forget to pick up a free copy of the new 2005-2006 Hunting & Trapping booklet. It contains the current hunting regulations and also a wealth of information that will help you have a safe, fun and enjoyable season.



©Bill Lea

in the northern Piedmont is good. According to the biologist, the southern Piedmont remains two distinct deer management areas: the southwestern Piedmont and the south-central Piedmont.

"In most south-central counties, deer-kill levels are back to their early-to mid-1990s levels," Knox says. "To stabilize these deer herds in the future, more liberal firearms season either-sex deer hunting opportunities are being considered for fall 2006."

Knox adds that the deer management situation in the southwestern Piedmont (those counties west of the dog line and east of the Blue Ridge) needs work. Liberal regulations over the past decade have failed to control deer herds, he says, akin to the north-

ern Piedmont. Past female deer-kill levels have not been adequate to control herd growth over much of this area.

"Herd condition indicates the deer herd quality in the southern Piedmont is good," Knox says.

"Eastern wild turkey population estimates have declined in recent years due to a series of poor production from 2001 to 2003," says Gary Norman, the Department's wild turkey project leader. "Current population estimates suggest we have approximately 100,000 to 125,000 turkeys in Virginia. The south mountain and Tidewater regions have the highest densities, followed by the south Piedmont, north mountain and north Piedmont."

Top-10 Counties for White-Tailed Deer Harvest (2004-2005)

Bedford	7,743
Loudoun	7,054
Fauquier	6,890
Shenandoah	5,268
Franklin	5,188
Albemarle	4,786
Pittsylvania	4,750
Southampton	4,748
Rockingham	4,741
Augusta	4,278

Top-10 Counties for Black Bear Harvest (2004-2005)

Rockingham	147
Alleghany	79
Page	75
Bath	70
Augusta	69
Shenandoah	61
Albemarle	56
Craig	53
Madison	53
Highland	52

Top-10 Counties for Wild Turkey Harvest (2004-2005)

Scott	205
Bedford	181
Franklin	174
Botetourt	173
Pittsylvania	164
Shenandoah	160
Halifax	155
Amelia	149
Rockbridge	122
Buckingham	118



©Marc McGlade

Looking for An Outdoor Show?

The Virginia Outdoor Sportsman Show, now in its 22nd year, will take place August 12-14, 2005, at the Showplace in Mechanicsville. Hugh Crittenden is the founder of this fine show. Crittenden resides in Chesterfield County, where he has been a taxidermist, owning Hugh's Taxidermy, for the past 35 years. Crittenden's love for the outdoors was his inspiration for creating the show.

Each year, this entertaining event showcases some of the biggest whitetails harvested in Virginia, judged during the Virginia Deer Classic. Hunters from across the state bring their mounts to see how they measure up against other hunters' trophies. Other contests include: the Virginia Gobbler Classic, the Virginia State Turkey Calling Championship and the Virginia State Champion Duck Calling Contest.

This show is an excellent kickoff to Virginia's fall hunting season. Crittenden has a full schedule of seminars arranged with nationally renowned hunters throughout the weekend. For additional information, call (804) 748-7529 or go online at www.sportsmanshow.com.

Norman indicates three important factors will influence fall turkey populations and hunting opportunities: spring population levels, reproductive success and mast conditions. Spring population levels can be described as moderate given the population declines in recent years. Despite this situation, Norman says we are nevertheless in good shape and should have good carry-over for the breeding population. Reproductive success is critically important as this serves to replenish natural and hunting losses. To a certain extent, he says, population changes (increases, decreases or no change) can be attributed to reproductive success. Turkey hunters often refer to this phenomenon as the "hatch." A good hatch can mean a good fall season; conversely, a bad hatch may translate to fewer young birds in the population, he says. Reproduction varies from year to year and Department research has found that cold April days and wet June days can affect poult survival and recruitment.

"In summary, we entered the spring season with good numbers of females, and depending on reproductive success this summer, we may have cause for hope of good numbers of birds afield this fall," Norman adds.

When acorns are available, turkeys tend to spend more time in the forest, they tend to travel less in search of food and their vulnerability to predators and hunters is reduced. Conversely, during mast failures, birds move frequently in search of food, often concentrate near clearings and their vulnerability to hunting increases.

"These conditions may make for some good hunting this year as fall birds are likely to be found near fields or clearings, in areas with good soft mast production or pockets with good acorn production," he says. "Pre-season scouting is recommended as local pockets with good mast crops can be expected and these areas will likely offer good hunting opportunities."

During the 2004-2005 hunting season, 1,130 black bears (*Ursus americanus*) were reported killed by



©Marc McGlade

hunters. This harvest represents a decrease of 25 percent from the previous harvest of 1,510, and a 13 percent increase from the previous high of 1,000 in 2000-2001. It is important to note that the harvest of 1,510 bears during the 2003-2004 season was an all-time record high in Virginia.

"The total included 736 males (65 percent) and 394 females (35 percent)," says Denny Martin, VDGI's black bear project leader.

Archery hunters arrowed 205 bruins (18 percent of the total harvest), a decrease of 46 percent from the previous year's harvest of 446, he says. However, the archery kill was close to the previous 35-year average of 17 percent of the total bear harvest.

"Firearms hunters killed 308 bears, representing 27 percent of the total harvest (the average is 31 percent) during the second week of the deer-gun season (first week of the bear-gun season)," Martin says. "That's a decrease of 18 percent from the previous year's harvest of 375."

Martin explains that 536 bears (47 percent of the total harvest, slightly less than the average of 51 percent) were harvested during the dog-hunting (hound) season, although hunters using hounds were not responsible for all of these; a decrease of 16, or 3 percent, from the 552 killed the previous year. Ninety-one bears were harvested during the four-day muzzleloading season, representing 8 percent of the total.

"Harvest west and east of the Blue

Ridge totaled 917 and 213, respectively, representing 81 and 19 percent of the total harvest,” Martin explains. “That’s a decrease of 14 percent and 52 percent from the previous year. The majority of the harvest (725 bears) came from the eight counties that contain the Shenandoah National Park (SNP). Similar to the 2003-2004 bear-hunting season, 6 percent, or 74 bears, of the statewide kill came from areas that were newly opened to bear hunting last year. The traditionally hunted areas of the mountains in western Virginia and the Dismal Swamp accounted for 94 percent of the total harvest (1,056 bears).”

Martin says good habitat is made up of a variety of types, including older-aged forests that produce acorns. Areas where timber is harvested provide blackberries, blueberries, sassafras berries and many other foods including insects or rodents, all of which are attractive black bear foods.”

Martin says the Rapidan WMA—bordering SNP in Greene and Madison counties—is the only public hunting lands available that border SNP. Most hunting lands around SNP are private property, he points out. However, archery hunters often are permitted to hunt these private lands.

A healthy population of bears exists in and around the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge area, too. This is a component of a large bear population in eastern North Carolina.

Hunting hard and having reasonable expectations is a good strategy regardless of your target species. Sitting on a log or at the base of a tree or plopped down in a blind or tree stand does not guarantee an animal will come face-to-face with you. Pay your dues, scout the areas and hunt hard, and this year could be one for you to reminisce for years to come. □

Marc McGlade is a writer and photographer from Midlothian. Marc is a regular contributor to Virginia Wildlife, Game & Fish, FLW Outdoors, North Carolina Sportsman, The Sportsman's Magazine and is a member of the Virginia Outdoor Writers Association.

For More Information

- For questions concerning hunting regulations, bag limits or any other hunting-related inquiries, contact VDGIF at (804) 367-1000, or go online at www.dgif.virginia.gov. A current copy of the *Hunting & Trapping in Virginia* pamphlet should be given to you when you purchase your license
- All hunters 12 to 15 years of age (or those 16 and over who have never been issued a hunting license) are required to take a

mandatory hunter education course.

- Hunting licenses and permits are valid from July 1 through June 30.
- Hunters for the Hungry is an organization dedicated to feeding people in need in Virginia. Their goal for 2005 is to distribute 350,000 pounds of venison to those in need. In 2004, they provided 333,536 pounds to the hungry. For additional information on this worthy cause, visit www.h4hungry.org, e-mail hunt4hungry@cs.com or call (800) 352-4868.



©Bill Lea

How To Care For Your Game

by Joan Cone

Good game eating begins in the field from the moment game is shot. This means that for game to reach the cook in prime condition, it must be handled properly by the hunter. First, all game animals, birds and waterfowl should be field dressed as soon after shooting as possible. Second, after game has been field dressed, it should be kept cool until it is either cooked or frozen. Third, unless game is wrapped properly for the freezer, it can be ruined by freezer burn, which will give it a gamey taste. Game, which has been taken care of correctly, should never have a strong, distasteful flavor.

Game should never be soaked. Soaking in salt water removes blood and juices. This makes game meat dryer. Old methods, such as soaking in vinegar, make your game taste just like vinegar. Soaking before freezing lets the meat absorb water which then forms ice crystals. These ice crystals expand during freezing and turn your good game into mushy meat.

Now, what about hanging? In the South generally it is too warm during hunting season to hang game, as the carcass temperature must be stabilized between 35° and 40°. Temperatures above 40° promote excess bacterial growth and cause fat to turn rancid.

Having listed the general principles for handling all game, here is how these apply to big game animals. It is imperative to field dress immediately. Always carry a cooler with ice if you plan on keeping the liver and heart. Place them in a plastic bag and cover with ice.

Big game animals should not be carried around on top of a car or in a pick-up to show friends. After it is field dressed, take the animal immediately to where you are going to butcher it. Hang it in a cool place and allow remaining blood to drain. Skinning your animal will aid in the cooling process.



©Soc Clay

Very large animals, such as elk and moose, should be quartered and then hung after removing all outside fat.

If you must transport your animal a long distance, skin it and remove forequarters and hindquarters from the backbone. Place these along with the tenderloin, ribs and neck in large plastic bags, tied, and place them in iced coolers. Cover these bags with ice. When the meat is iced well, it can be left on ice for a day or two before butchering.

Since it is impossible to maintain an outside temperature of 35° to 40°, proper aging must be done in a meat locker. However, freezing does help age meat and make it tender. Your large, tied plastic bags of game meat can be kept up to 10 days in the refrigerator before and while butchering. This also will help age meat.

The outside fat on all big game animals should be removed. You should try and bone your big game meat, as the fat in marrow will become rancid even when frozen. Also, by boning your meat, it will be easier to wrap against freezer burn and take up less freezer space.

After wrapping twice in plastic, large roasts and rib sections can be placed in 2 or 2 1/2 gallon plastic bags. Use a straw to suction air out. Your steaks, stew meat and ground meat can be weighed and wrapped twice in plastic and placed in heavy-duty freezer bags.

The very best way to freeze any game is to use a vacuum packer. An inexpensive model will do fine. After twice wrapping in plastic, place your steaks, roasts, stew or ground meat in the bags, which come with the vacuum packer. The vacuum packer will suction out the air and then seal the bag. Be sure to mark cut, weight and date on each package.

It is better not to add any fat to your ground big game meat until you are ready to cook it, as fat will not hold up well in the freezer. I have kept ground deer, elk and moose, without fat, wrapped as above for one year or longer with no change in color or flavor. You can refreeze game meat, which has defrosted as long as the meat is still cool to the touch. Be sure, though, to rewrap the meat in new materials. □

Two's Company, Three's

A Crowd!

Dove hunting without a lot of people has its advantages if you follow a few simple rules.

by Gerald Almy

When the subject of dove hunting comes up, most Virginia sportsmen conjure up images of huge fields of harvested grain surrounded by dozens of shooters waiting for birds to fly under a hot noon-day sun. There are coolers full of soft drinks and a party-like atmosphere prevails on the opening day hunt. Good-natured ribbing and banter is shouted back and forth as the birds begin to fly, swooping in like gray ghosts.

The shooting is fast and furious, especially at a few of the better positions around the field. At others it's only fair, but since there are so many shooters, one can't simply move to where the birds are flying. Someone else is already in that prime spot.

But it's as much a social event as it is a hunt, anyway. After the doves stop flying, there will be barbecue, baked beans, potato salad, coleslaw and homemade desserts served on picnic tables. It's an annual celebration, and for many participants, it's the only time they go "dove hunting."

Dove hunting can be a social event involving lots of people, but a quiet afternoon with just you, your dog and some fast flying doves is hard to beat.



Attention Migratory Bird Hunters Get HIP!

All hunters (whether licensed or exempt from being licensed) who plan to hunt dove, waterfowl, rails, woodcock, snipe, coots, gallinules or moorhens in Virginia must be registered with the Virginia Harvest Information Program (HIP). HIP is required each year and a new registration number is needed for the 2005-2006 hunting season. To obtain a new number, migratory game bird hunters can register online at www.dgif.virginia.gov or call 1-888-788-9772.

If you don't have the social connections to be invited to such festive dove shoots, or simply don't care for the crowds, take heart. There's another kind of Virginia dove hunting. And though I've enjoyed a few social dove shoots over the years, this latter kind is the type I really prefer: dove hunting alone or with just one or two friends.

Contrary to common belief, you don't really need a truckload of hunters to surround a field for a good dove hunt. Fine shooting can be enjoyed alone or with a few other hunters. This is the kind of dove hunting I've specialized in for over 30 years, and it's yielded more than a few delicious dove dinners. It also

gives me the feeling that I've really been hunting, instead of simply filling some designated stand site.

Time must be allotted for scouting and locating good areas to hunt. Then you have to watch the birds to see which flight routes they are using, just like you might pattern a buck's movements from bedding to feeding areas. But the feeling of accomplishment when you bag birds is greater, since you use your own hunting skills, rather than simply showing up at an organized shoot.

Another advantage of this type of dove hunting is that if the initial spot you select doesn't pan out, you're free to move to where more birds are flying. If a large number of doves land in a field, you can sneak up and try to jump shoot them and get the birds flying again or perhaps past your partner's location. There's a satisfying feeling of being in control of events.

Another plus of this type of hunting is that you can shoot small fields or even near watering holes without driving the doves away. Big, high-volume shoots can burn out such areas in just a day or two.

Virginia is a great place to hunt doves alone or with a couple of companions. The state has large populations of resident birds and migrating doves swell their numbers by the millions from September through January. A number of public hunting



©Gerald A. Almy

Scouting is an important factor to consider when looking for a good dove hunting location. It is also a good idea to find a spot that offers a variety of habitat, which includes watering holes, feeding areas and places where doves can roost.

areas managed by the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries offer good dove hunting prospects. If you do some searching you can also find some smaller farms tucked away here and there where a solo hunter or small group can enjoy good shooting.

I came across one such gem a couple of seasons back that yielded a prime example of the type of quality hunting you can enjoy without a

large party. In fact, I was alone that day. I had scouted the area before and noticed birds hanging around on telephone wires and in one lone, scraggly tree. The corn hadn't been cut yet then, so there wasn't a lot of activity. But it looked like it had potential.

When I returned this time a small field of about four acres had been freshly cut and doves were flying already, even though it was just early afternoon. After stopping in to see the landowner, I headed out. The farm couldn't have covered more than 20 acres total, but there was plenty of cover to make the birds feel comfortable. A row of brush split the cornfield in the middle and a fallow field lay next to it. A finger of rocks and

saplings juttied into that second, unplanted field.

That looked like the perfect spot for a stand, so I headed for that area. As I walked, I noticed a pond in a hollow to my right that I hadn't seen before. This really was a dove paradise!

That became even more evident when a pair of the gray speedsters nearly dive-bombed me as I walked in. Caught off-guard, I quickly wasted two shots from the double barrel Winchester as they zipped past. When I settled in on the point of brush dividing the two fields, I calmed down and my shooting improved dramatically. Soon I had three doves in the bag, but a large number of other birds had settled into the field and were not moving.

Public Dove Hunting Opportunities in Virginia

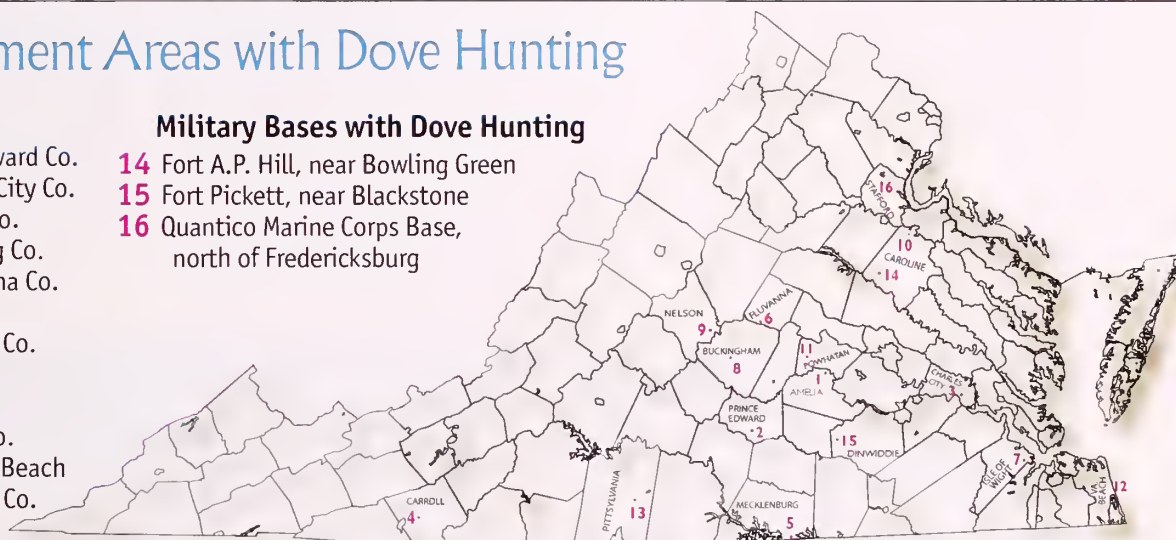
Though most dove hunting in the state takes place on private land, some wildlife management areas and military bases offer dove shooting open to the public. Hunting may be only allowed on certain days, typically Wednesdays and Saturdays, so check ahead of time to find out when hunting is permitted. Many of these locations feature fields planted with sunflowers, wheat, corn, grain sorghum, Egyptian wheat and brown-top millet, which is picked or mowed and disked shortly before the season opens in September.

Wildlife Management Areas with Dove Hunting

- 1 Amelia WMA, Amelia Co.
- 2 Briery Creek WMA, Prince Edward Co.
- 3 Chickahominy WMA, Charles City Co.
- 4 Crooked Creek WMA, Carroll Co.
- 5 Dick Cross WMA, Mecklenburg Co.
- 6 Hardware River WMA, Fluvanna Co.
- 7 Hog Island WMA, Surry Co.
- 8 Horsepen WMA, Buckingham Co.
- 9 James River WMA, Nelson Co.
- 10 Pettigrew WMA, Caroline Co.
- 11 Powhatan WMA, Powhatan Co.
- 12 Princess Anne WMA, Virginia Beach
- 13 White Oak WMA, Pittsylvania Co.

Military Bases with Dove Hunting

- 14 Fort A.P. Hill, near Bowling Green
- 15 Fort Pickett, near Blackstone
- 16 Quantico Marine Corps Base, north of Fredericksburg





Care of Harvested Doves

Follow these simple steps to make sure you have the highest quality table fare when you return home after a dove hunt. For starters, never pile the birds on top of each other in a game pouch on the back of a vest or hunting coat. Body heat cannot dissipate that way, and they may begin to spoil.

Place them spread out in the shade, instead, so they can cool down. Alternately, you can put the birds on ice in a cooler. Be sure to leave one fully feathered wing on each bird, though, as federal law requires.

When you arrive home, either pluck the doves and remove the wings, feet, head and intestines or de-breast them. Wash the birds and store in the refrigerator until you're ready to cook them. If you can't eat them within a couple of days, double wrap the doves and freeze them for later meals.

Doves are great when cooked on a grill, baked, fried or barbecued. The meat is slightly dark, yet delicate and richly flavored. You definitely won't find anything like it in a supermarket!

Extra Gear for Dove Hunts

Besides gun and shells, other gear you should bring on a dove hunt includes a hat with a brim, sunscreen, cooler for drinks and doves, shooting glasses or sunglasses, insect repellent, ear plugs, a folding stool or 10-gallon bucket painted a drab color, binoculars and optionally, a few decoys to place in trees or on a fence wire.

Easing out in a hunched position, I flushed them and took a single bird as they erupted with whistling wings. Another time I went to retrieve a downed bird and a second dove zoomed overhead, eluding my shot with a deft swerve in its flight.

There were plenty of other misses as the day wore on. I always do my share of missing when doves are the quarry. By late afternoon I was stopping to thank the farmer and offer him a portion of the 12 doves now chilling in the cooler. It had been one of my most enjoyable dove hunts ever, and proof positive that you don't always need a crowd to enjoy prime dove hunting.

Make a scouting trip or two before the season opens to find a quality dove setup such as the one I enjoyed that day. Drive back roads in the area you hope to hunt and watch for birds flying or resting in dead trees or on power lines. The nice thing about hunting by yourself or with a couple of friends is that you don't need a large concentration of doves to enjoy good sport. A small grain field or cut-over being used by a few dozen doves will suit just fine.

Find a slightly elevated spot if you can and look over the territory using binoculars. Watch birds long enough to determine their main flight routes and feeding destinations, then approach the landowner and ask permission. Be sure to indicate that you'll only hunt with a couple of other people or alone, and that you'll watch where you shoot and make sure gates are closed and no trash or empty shells are left behind.

Shy away from big agricultural spreads. Chances are clubs or other groups will have already locked up those fields if they are good for dove shooting. They aren't as easy for a small group of hunters to cover anyway. Look for more modest-sized farms, particularly those where corn has just been harvested. Other grains are also used regularly by these birds,

Having a good dog that can retrieve lost birds will often make up for a truck full of nearsighted hunters looking for a needle in a haystack.

such as millet, milo and sorghum.

A pond nearby for water, plus a few evergreens for roosting and a power line or two for loafing add to the appeal an area has for doves. If possible, also look for setups with a hedgerow along the edge of the field for cover and a couple of old leafless trees for the birds to land and rest in before swooping down to feed.

Before entering the field on the day of the hunt, watch which way the doves are flying. Search the ground with binoculars, too, for feeding birds and check out nearby trees and power lines. Plan on starting about mid-afternoon, since doves seldom fly much before that during the hot part of the day.

Generally doves will use a few lanes or travel routes as they come into or out of a field. You may have discovered some of this during pre-season scouting, but also watch on the day you hunt to confirm where the birds are flying. Often a wooded point, large tree, field corner or notch in the tree line will draw birds past as they fly in to feed.

Locate your stand under or close to one of these flyways, but also



©Dwight Dyke



Look for dusting and ground feeding birds

where there is enough cover, such as a row of cedars, brush, a fence line or some standing corn, so your silhouette is broken up. Wearing camouflage or at least drab-colored clothing also helps.

As you enter the field, don't just barge in. Instead, hunt your way to the stand location. Doves may already be in the field. More than once I've made a good start on bagging a limit before even reaching the stand by jump shooting the gray speedsters.

Another non-traditional tactic I use is flushing the birds if they aren't

flying well. You can't do this on a big social shoot, but if your friends and you have agreed on the tactic ahead of time, it can pay to occasionally send one person out to stir things up. That hunter might get a shot as the doves flush or he might send them flying past those on stand.

Don't feel like you have to stay at the same spot all afternoon on a dove hunt by yourself or with a few friends. Flexibility is one of the great appeals of this type of dove shooting. If your stand site isn't panning out or cools off after a while, switch to another spot where more birds seem to be flying. I've changed location as many as three or four times during a hunt. If you can bag a few birds from each spot before it dries up, you'll have plenty of doves to take home at the end of the day.

I use a double barrel side-by-side shotgun for my dove hunting and find an improved cylinder/modified combination works well for most solo or small-group outings. A Winchester Model 24 double in 20 gauge is my main dove gun, but if birds are flying real close, I switch to a 16 gauge Stevens double with open

choke handed down to me by my father.

If you have a single barrel, pump or autoloader, improved cylinder is usually the best choice, but keep a modified screw-in choke tube on hand in case the birds are flying a bit further than you expected. If they are flying real close, a skeet or open bore might be best of all. Any gauge from 12 to 28 will work, with number 7 1/2 or 8 shot the best size pellet.

Don't ignore large-scale social dove hunts if you get an invitation to one. But do yourself a favor and try some small-scale solo shoots or hunts with just a friend or two this fall as well. Hundreds of small fields that are useless for the big clubs are waiting for a single hunter or small group to enjoy. And when you use your hunting skills instead of simply showing up and taking an assigned stand, you'll find the satisfaction of bagging this speedy gray quarry runs especially deep. □

Gerald Almy is a fulltime outdoor writer and photographer and has been a regular contributor to Virginia Wildlife magazine for over 20 years.





Journal

2005 Outdoor Calendar of Events

August 26-28: Mother-Daughter Outdoors, Holiday Lake 4-H Educational Center, Appomattox. For more information contact Jimmy Mootz at 804-367-0656 or e-mail Jimmy.Mootz@dgif.virginia.gov. □



Time To Change Your Plates...

by Jennifer Worrell

Page County Game Warden Neil Kester meets some interesting characters while on night hunting patrol. One particular night, the officer observed a truck creeping by the field he was watching. Suddenly the driver turned the vehicle sideways and shined his headlights on the deer in the field. He decided not to shoot at the animals and continued on. Kester sped off after the driver. When the warden stopped the vehicle, he found a father and son with two guns in the truck. Upon further investigation, he learned that the father was a convicted felon as well. As Kester wrote all the summonses, he was not surprised that the license plates on the perpetrator's truck read, "Poacher." □

2004 Morgan Award

This year's Morgan Award recipient, Michael Holson, became a Hunter Education instructor on June 9, 1996. Since that time, he has contributed more than 2000 hours to the



© Jennifer Worrell

Left to right: Karen Holson, VDGIF Program Development Coordinator; Linda Mays, sister of W. D. Morgan; Magdeline Morgan, mother of W. D. Morgan; Michael Holson, Hunter Education Instructor of the Year and Sandra Spencer, sister of W. D. Morgan.

Outdoor Education program, teaching more than 1200 students. He has demonstrated consistent excellence in teaching the public, training instructors, contributing to new programs, and developing educational tools for use by other instructors. Last year, he was responsible for putting together a teaching team for two hunter education courses at the new permanent classroom in the Fredericksburg Gander Mountain store. He has been an instructor for 25 classes at public events, teaching on a wide variety of topics, including Survival, Map and Compass, Animal Tracking, Fishing, and Firearms live-fire. He has taught at Becoming an Outdoor Woman programs, Family Outdoor Weekends, Boy Scout Camporees, Youth Hunts, Women's Hunts, WITO events and other scheduled DGIF events.

Also during the last five years, he has trained other volunteer instructors in 11 advanced training disciplines. He has been an instructor for Map and Compass, GPS, Survival, Teaching Hunter Education, and Alternative Delivery. He has also trained fellow instructors to teach Map and Compass and Survival.

The best description for this

year's award winner is, "Mr. Enthusiasm." Mr. Holson works as a school teacher for the Department of Corrections, which has allowed him to develop superb teaching and curriculum development skills, which he has used extensively to benefit Virginia's Hunter Education Program as shown through leading the volunteer effort to develop a PowerPoint slide presentation, covering all of the teaching objectives of the basic hunter education course. This presentation was finished last year, and is now available to instructors statewide.

He is an outstanding example of a volunteer who has committed a tremendous amount of time, energy, and skill to hunter education.

The Morgan Award is an annual award in memory of William Dixon Morgan presented to Virginia's hunter education instructor who has made extensive contributions for hunter safety. □



"Throw me back and I'll show you where there's a 12 pounder hiding."

RECIPES

by Joan Cone

Easy Meals on the Trail

Looking for a quick outdoors meal while floating a river, at hunting camp or on the trail that your entire family will enjoy? Be sure to carry a cooler for perishables. For most of these recipes you need a camp stove, skillet or a large pot along with cutlery, bowls or plates.

Menu

Saucy Cheeseburgers
Bacon And Tomato Shells
Turkey Wraps
Grilled Tuna 'n Cheese Sandwiches
Chicken Barbecue On Buns

Saucy Cheeseburgers

- 1 pound extra lean ground beef
- 4 tablespoons steak sauce
- 4 onion slices
- 4 cheese slices
- 4 tomato slices
- 4 whole wheat hamburger buns

Combine ground beef and 2 tablespoons steak sauce in a large bowl. Shape into four 1/2-inch patties. Spray both sides of 4 onion slices with cooking spray and set aside. Cook patties on a grill over medium-high heat or in a skillet for 4 minutes on each side or until cooked through, adding onions after 2 minutes and cooking until crisp-tender. Top each burger with 1 cheese slice and continue cooking until cheese slice is melted. Place burgers on bottom halves of 4 split whole wheat hamburger buns. Top evenly with additional 2 tablespoons steak sauce and cover with tomatoes, onions and top halves of buns. Makes 4 servings.

Bacon and Tomato Shells

- 1 package (12 ounces) shells and cheese
- 1/4 cup real bacon bits
- 1 chopped tomato

Prepare dinner following basic directions. Add 1/4 cup real bacon bits and 1 chopped tomato along with cheese sauce enclosed in package. Stir until well blended. Makes 4 serving

Turkey Wraps

- 4 (10-inch) flour tortillas, warmed

- 1/2 cup ranch dressing
- 8 thin slices cooked turkey
- 1 cup chopped tomato
- 8 slices Swiss cheese
- 1/4 cup real bacon bits

To assemble wrap, spread each tortilla with 2 tablespoons salad dressing. Layer with 2 slices turkey, 1/4 cup tomato, 2 slices cheese and sprinkle with bacon bits. Fold two opposite edges of tortilla toward the center over filling. Roll up one open end of tortilla toward opposite edge. Repeat with remaining tortillas. Cut each tortilla in half to serve. Makes 8 mini or 4 large sandwiches.

Grilled Tuna 'n Cheese Sandwiches

- 1 can (6 1/2 ounces) chunk light tuna in water
- 1/4 cup diced celery
- 1 teaspoon prepared mustard
- 1/3 cup mayonnaise
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 8 slices rye bread
- 4 slices Cheddar cheese
- 2 tablespoons butter or margarine

Drain tuna. Combine tuna, celery, mustard, and salt and pepper. Fold in mayonnaise. Spoon mixture equally on 4 slices of bread. Top each with a slice of cheese and remaining bread. Melt butter in skillet and brown sandwiches in skillet pressing them down with a pancake turner. Turn and brown other side. Slice each sandwich in half. Makes 4 servings.

Chicken Barbecue on Buns

- 4 tablespoons chopped celery
- 4 tablespoons chopped onion
- 4 tablespoons chopped green pepper
- Dash garlic powder
- 2 tablespoon butter or margarine
- 1/2 cup prepared barbecue sauce
- 1 can (10 ounces) chunk white or thigh chicken
- 4 hamburger buns split and toasted

In saucepan, cook celery, onion and green pepper with garlic powder in butter until tender. Add barbecue sauce and chicken. Heat, stirring occasionally. Serve on buns. Makes 8 open-face sandwiches. □

On The Water

by Jim Crosby

Water Safety Patrols



©Jim Crosby



©Jim Crosby

You should be aware of some very special vessels out there on the water with you. They are a glorious sight when you are having trouble, or in trouble on the water.

The vessels I refer to are the ones that have a red, white and blue banner or placard on each side that says in bold, black letters "PATROL." In smaller print, they say, "Coast Guard Auxiliary."

You will likely find these vessels on Lake Anna, Smith Mountain Lake, Claytor Lake, James River, York River, Potomac River, Rappahannock River, Hampton Roads and the Chesapeake Bay.

The leading volunteer force of the Department of Homeland Security—members of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary operate these vessels.

Congress established the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary in 1939 to assist the Coast Guard in promoting boating safety. It includes more than 30,000 members from all walks of life who receive special training so that they may be a functional part of the Coast Guard Forces. Auxiliarists assist the Coast Guard in non-law enforcement programs such as public education, vessel safety checks, safe-

Above: This fleet of Coast Guard Auxiliary vessels are lined up at the dock of the Coast Guard Auxiliary Search and Rescue Detachment on Lake Anna. The station is located in the southeast corner of the dam beside Pleasants Landing. Top right: This vessel of the Coast Guard Auxiliary is shown underway on Lake Anna. These vessels are equipped with blankets, first aid kits, extra life jackets, de-anchoring equipment, de-watering equipment and special towing apparatus.

ty patrols, search and rescue, maritime security and environmental protection. Auxiliarists volunteer more than 2 million hours annually to benefit other boaters and their families.

Nationally, on an average day, the Coast Guard Auxiliary completes 62.5 safety patrols, 6.2 regatta patrols, performs 10.2 vessel assists, assists 28 people, saves 1 life, saves \$341,290 in property while participating in 100 operational support missions.

Auxiliary resources for 2005 include 4,758 operational vessels, 272 aircraft, 2,757 communications stations, and 263 personal watercraft facilities.

Auxiliary volunteer mission

hours last year included 85,505 safety patrol hours, 6,779 air patrol hours and 25,381 Coast Guard support mission hours.

Auxiliary qualified team members include 5,054 boat crewman, 3,854 coxswains, 565 air observers, and 266 pilots.

That is a lot of service by a great number of volunteers the people of this country are getting free every year. May I suggest that the next time you spot one of these vessels with the special identification, offer them a wave as a thank you for their "free" services on the water because if you break down, they will tow you to safe harbor. If you have questions, they will pull along side and offer answers. If you get lost, they will help find you. If you want your vessel checked for safety, they will offer you a free vessel safety check. If you want boat training, they will offer you a class and course of study.

Remember, they are there to serve you, volunteering their time and efforts on your behalf. □

I always appreciate your feedback, questions and/or suggestions sent to jimcrosby@aol.com.



Naturally Wild

story and illustration
by Spike Knuth

Long-Nosed Gar *Lepisosteus osseus*

The gar is often referred to, or said to be, the living relative of a group of primitive fish known mostly from the fossil records; a living fossil. There are five species of gar in the eastern North America with the long-nosed gar being the most common in the southeast U.S. and the most widely distributed. The long nose inhabits warm, often turbid waters of lakes, swamps, backwater bays and sloughs, and sluggish rivers both fresh and brackish.

Along with a cylindrical body, it is easily identified by its long, toothy mouth, which is more like a long skinny bill. It is called billfish in some areas, as well as billy gar or garfish. Another one of its local names is gar pike. The scales of the gar are small, diamond-shaped, hard, smooth plates known as ganoid-type scales. They are composed of ganoin, a hard dentine-like substance.

Color-wise, it's olive-brown to deep olive-green on top fading to yellow-olive to silvery sides and silvery-white bellies. The dorsal fin is set far back near the tail and directly above the anal fin on the bottom. The fins are reddish with dark spots much

like the pikes, but the tail is large and rounded. Some lack body spots, especially in turbid waters. These fish average two to three feet in length, but can get up to 6 feet in length. The state record is a 25 pound, 2 ounce fish.

Gars will often lie motionless on or near the surface, especially in summer when they come up to sun or gulp and expel air as oxygen levels get low. The air bladder is much like a true lung with air sacs and blood vessels. They open and close their bills so quickly that they often make a snapping noise.

In spring the female, accompanied by up to eight males, will release her eggs in the weedy shallows where they drop and adhere to aquatic vegetation. The hatched young attach to submerged vegetation with suction disks atop their upper bills—much the same as pike fry do. The young hatch in seven to 10 days and once their yolk sac is absorbed they begin feeding voraciously. They may grow 6 to 8 inches their

first year. The young are dark brown in color marked with creamy colored stripes and a dark band.

Gars feed mainly on other fishes and are quite a handful when you hook one on rod and reel. They hunt by floating slowly on or near the surface, but show unbelievable speed by exploding after any prey that wanders too close. They tend to be nocturnal feeders, but will feed in daylight.

They are not considered a food fish, but some writings say they were roasted by the Seminoles in Florida, and marketed in North Carolina in the 1880s. Some claim that the meat is white and firm, but most recipes call for sauces to aid in its palatability. Their eggs are poisonous. The ganoid scales were used to make arrowheads and jewelry, and the hide was tough enough to be used to line old wooden plowshares. □





The New 2005-2006

Virginia Wildlife Calendar



Is Now Available

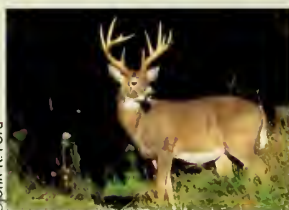
It's that time of year again to purchase the 2005-2006 Virginia Wildlife Calendar, one of the most informative and beautiful wildlife calendars in the country. No other calendar will give you the best times to go fishing and hunting, unique natural resource information that will amaze and educate you, and spectacular wildlife art and photographs that give you an up-close look at Virginia's incredible wildlife.

The Virginia Wildlife Calendar is a production of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, and customers are reminded that the wildlife calendar starts in September 2005 and runs through August 2006. Quantities are limited and sales will run from July 15 through December 31, 2005, so don't wait. Order now!

The 2005-2006 Virginia Wildlife Calendars are \$10.00 each. Make check payable to: *Treasurer of Virginia* and send to Virginia Wildlife Calendar, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA. 23230-1104. If you would like to use your VISA or MasterCard you can order online at www.dgif.virginia.gov. Please allow 4 to 6 weeks for delivery.



©John R. Ford



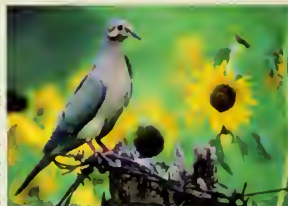
©John R. Ford



©John R. Ford



©Richard Day



©Maslowski Photo



©Bill Lindner Photo/ra.hy



©John R. Ford

For Virginia Wildlife subscription calls only 1-800-710-9369
Twelve issues for \$12.95

All other calls to (804) 367-1000
Visit our Web Site at www.dgif.virginia.gov